

Empowering rural women by participating in sustainable environmental management: A case study of Banasthali University, Rajasthan

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Abstract

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the rural women living around the Banasthali University, Rajasthan and how they empowered themselves by participating in sustainable environmental management programmes and to evolve alternative strategies of education and empowerment of rural women so as to enable them to participate, in the economic, political and social sustainable development of the rural society. The study is mainly based on the primary sources of data by putting direct personal interviews of about 100 women respondents who are engaged in these management practices. The result showed drastic changes in the different aspects of life of these women, they feel empowered economically, socially and mentally after joining in these management practices. These rural women workers have experienced an increase in income primarily because of the paid employment opportunity and benefits have been realized through income-consumption effects, intra-household effects and the enhancement of choice and capability. They can now participate equally in major household decisions and have significant influence on the choices that their children make. As women are the mirror of a society, so they need to be empowered.

Keywords: Empowerment, management, rural, Women.

Introduction

The world is currently facing the greatest environmental crisis i.e. how to sustain over 7 billion people while maintaining a habitable environment. The fast growing populations with highly technological advancement are continuously putting pressure on the environment as well as on the natural resources of every country. Hence there is an urgent need to conserve and manage the global environment in a more sustainable way.

In India, 70% of the population live in rural areas and directly depend upon natural/local resources (Census of India, 2011). Rural women still remain a disadvantaged segment of Indian society. And most of the training programmes have hardly any female participation. While rural males have opportunities in construction, trade, transport, storage, and services, these are mostly denied to rural females. Obviously, opportunities must be created to enable them to acquire the skills necessary for entering these

newly emerging occupations. Women comprise half of human resources they have been identified as key agents of sustainable development and women's equality is as central to a more holistic approach towards establishing new patterns and process of development that are sustainable (Agrawal & Nelasco, 2009). The contribution of women and their role in the family as well as in the economic development and social transformation are pivotal. Women constitute 90 per cent of total marginal workers of the country. Rural women who are engaged in agriculture form 78 per cent of all women in regular work (Thakur, 2009).

Women have direct contact with the locally available resources like fuel for cooking, food, fodder for their livestock, forest, water, land etc. especially in rural areas in their day to day live in order to fulfill their basic needs. So, they can easily understand the problems faced due to the shortage of these resources. Thus, they can play an important role in the conservation and management of these natural resources. The empowerment of rural women includes not only economic independence but also to improve their quality of life in terms of self-identity in the society, decision making in the family etc. According to 2011 census of India, the total population is more than 1.21 billion in which 50 per cent belongs to women. About 77 per cent female population live in rural areas (Census of India, 2011). They share abundant responsibility and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the family, maintaining the household activities like rearing and feeding livestock, cooking, in farm labour etc. they are often neglected and could not get the recognition of their work and status which they deserve. They suffer from being both economically and socially weak. So, it is prime obligation of each and every citizen to empower

these rural women by uplifting in any form. The agencies/institutions who are working at rural areas can play an important role to empower these rural women by creating job opportunities and training or making participation in appropriate work.

Keeping these aspects in mind, in this paper, an attempt has been made to examine how Banasthali University has empowered the rural women in the form of economically, socially, mentally etc. by participating in the sustainable environmental management programmes and to evolve alternative strategies of education and empowerment of rural women so as to enable them to participate, as equal citizens, in the economic, political and social sustainable development of the rural society.

Data Base and Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary sources of data which were collected through direct personal interviews (100 women respondents) who are involved in – Production of vermicompost, weaving & tailoring of *khadi*, making of organic foods in Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) etc. as well as the officials of KVK, Anoopcharik Shiksha Kendra etc.

The secondary data were collected from different sources like Office records/Annual reports of University and from related departments.

Study Area

Banasthali University is a women university located in Tonk district about 70 kms from Jaipur city, capital of Rajasthan, India (Fig. 1). This University was established by the first chief minister of Rajasthan, Shri Hiralal Shastri in 1935 with the aim of not only imparting scientific knowledge but also PANCMUKHI SHIKSHA (five-fold education) – Intellectual, Physical, Practical, Aesthetic and Moral aspect.

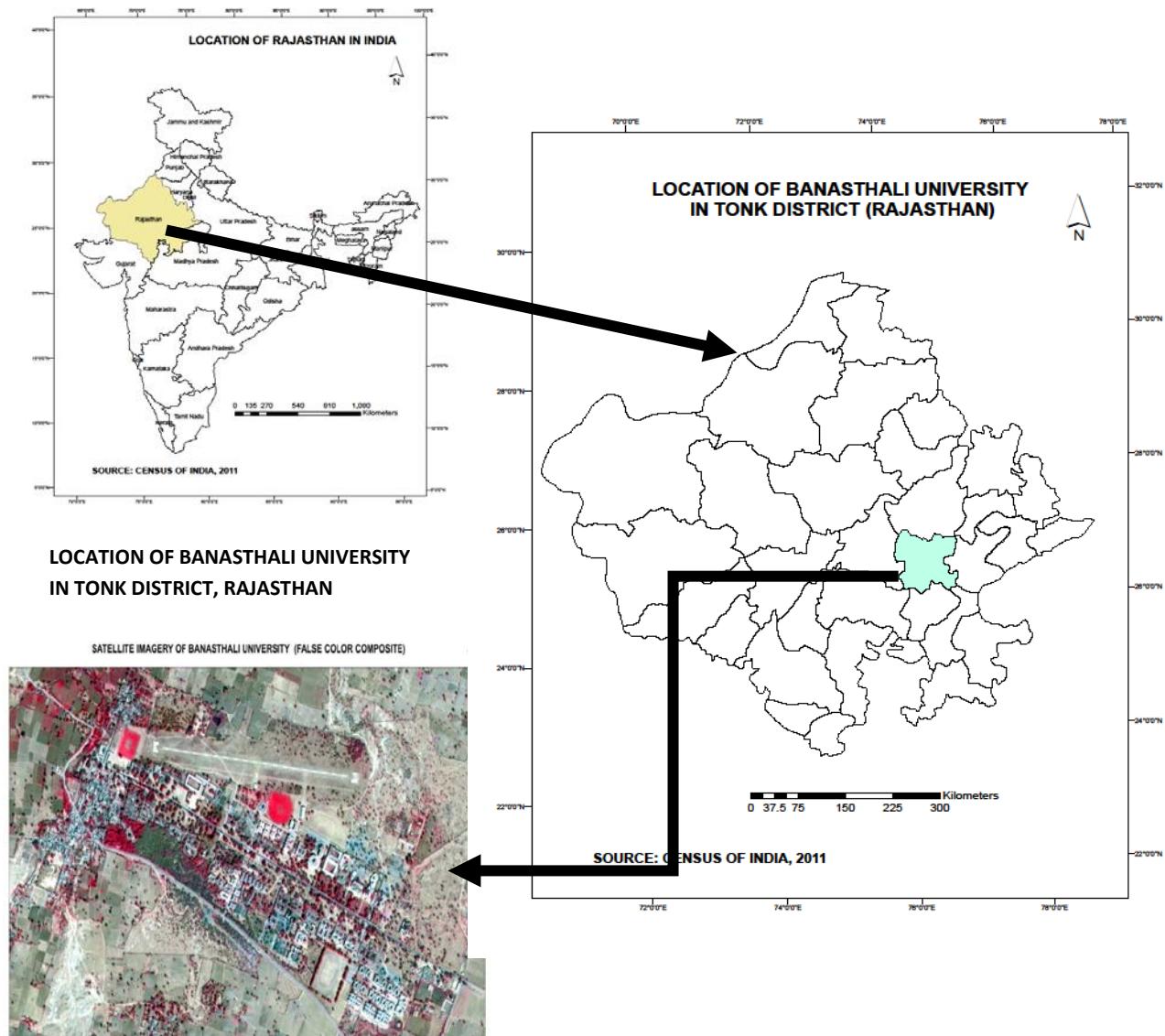


Fig. 1: Location Map of Banasthali University.



Fig. 2: Rural women workers engaged in vermicompost production.



Fig. 3: Rural Women workers engaged in making khadi clothes.

The University aimed at promoting education, training and research in the context of a synthesis of the spiritual heritage of the east and the scientific achievements of the west and actively engaged in preserving and inculcating the essential values and ideas of Indian culture. The University has dedicated itself to the achievements of the above aims and objectives with reference to the needs and aspirations of the Indian women (Annual report, 2013-14). Banasthali University also actively engaged in sustainable environmental management techniques such as -

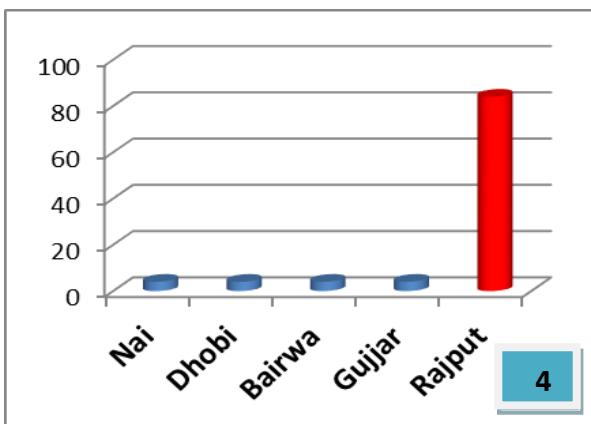
(1) **Recycling of waste water** – to conserve the waste water and to fulfill the shortage of water inside the university campus, the university set up a Sewer Treatment Plant in 2005 for an ultimate flow of 600 M³ /day to recycle the waste water for the purpose of gardening and flushing of toilets of many hostels.

(2) **Production of vermicompost** - The production of vermicompost was started in 1997 which is about 600 KL/day to fulfill the requirement of Organic farming and to compensate the gap of requirement for agricultural firms of the University. About 40% workers are women from neighbouring villages (Fig.2).

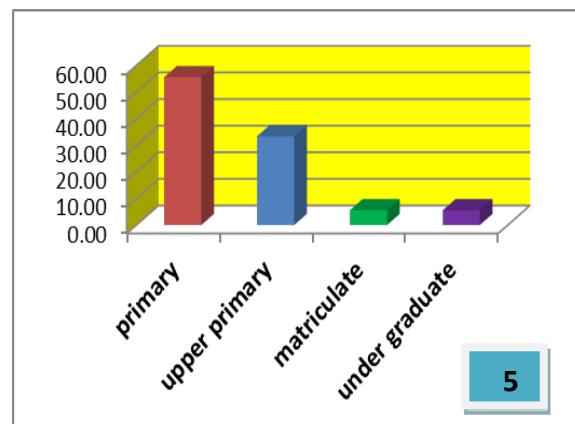
(3) **Establishment of organic farms** – the university has their own agriculture farms for the purpose of seed production and research work. These farms are-

(i) Sarsadi Farm is 3 kms. away from the university having area of 25 hectares. It was established in 1995. Major crops such as wheat, barley, mustard, gram, bajara, till, moong, urad, chawla, gwar, groundnut, etc. While the major fruits are *amla*, *ber*, lemon, guava, *beel*, etc.

(ii) Krishi Vigyan Kendra has an agricultural farm and research centre about agriculture. In this women from the nearby villages trained and



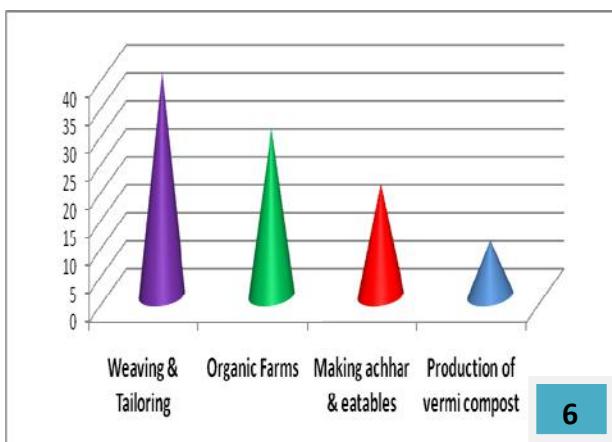
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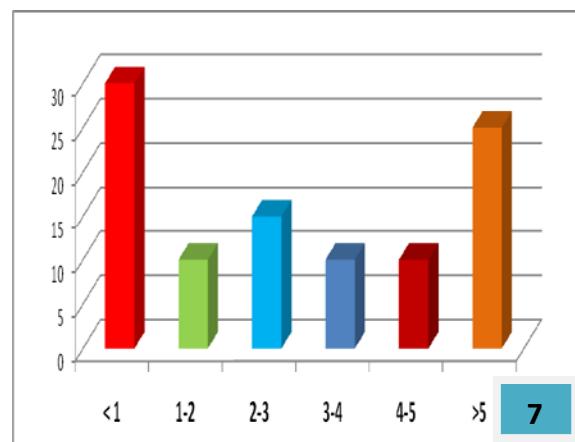
Fig.4: Caste – wise profile of the sampled respondents.

Fig. 5: Levels of Education.



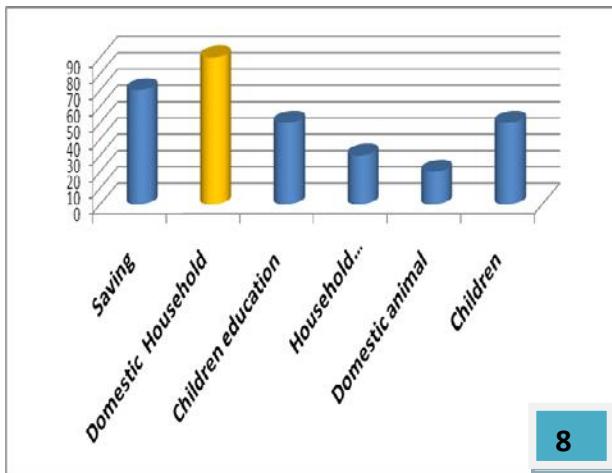
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Fig. 6: Occupational Structure.



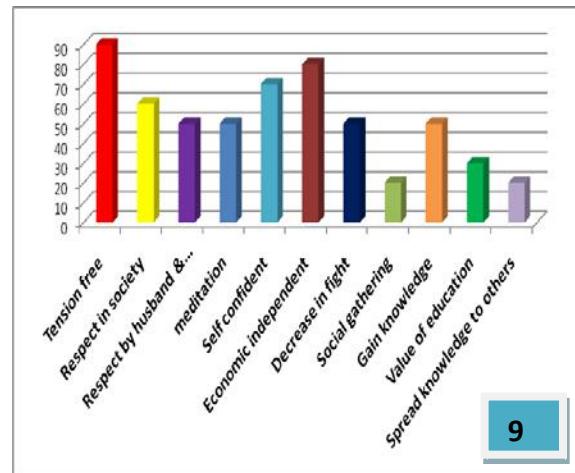
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Fig. 7: Years of working.



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Fig. 8: Expenditure on different activities.



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Fig. 9: Changes in different aspects of life.

Source: Based on Field Survey, 2014-15.

engaged in making of *candy*, *murrabas* and pickles coming from the Sarsadi farm and earned 2.50 lakhs/annum from the sell of these products.

(4) **Anopcharik shiksha Kendra-** Initially this centre was started with 30 women of nearby villages (Haripura, Karanpura, Rampura, Jugalpura, etc.) where women were trained to make papad, mangori, stitching, embroidery, carpet weaving, etc. Presently, with the help of 50 amber charkhas and 15 looms about 70-75 women are working from 10 different villages on the wages of 130 Rs./day. The products i.e., khadi clothes which they made are used for the students uniform as well as sold at exhibition held every year. The centre earned profit of Rs. 40,000 and Rs. 20,000 from first and second exhibition respectively. Khadi manufacturing is providing source of income to the rural women and empowering them, at the same time it is helping to conserve our environment in eco-friendly manner (Fig. 3).

(5) **Solar energy system** – there are solar water heaters in every hostels, roof top grid solar connect SPV power plants and solar street light inside the campus.

The University especially involved rural workers both male and female from the nearby villages in these management techniques by giving training as well as paid them for their work.

Discussions

The majority of the sampled respondents belongs to joint family of Rajput caste (82%) (fig. 4) which is male dominated and doesn't allow to send their wives to work outside and not in every place and even they did not allow to participate in decision making. But Banasthali University being a women university provides a secure and respectable place for them.

In rural India, there are lack of schools and colleges within a village or locality, lack of women teacher, unsafe way to school, it leads to lack of education among women. Most of these women are uneducated (90 per cent) and those who are educated but only up to mostly primary level (fig. 5). Due to lack of training centre related to occupation of women, a big part of human resources left unskilled or semiskilled.

Rural women may contribute in national economic development by household based works like knitting, weaving, embroidery, bakery, flour milling, food preparation and its preservation. The sampled respondents after taking full training from the university and worked in weaving and tailoring (35%), organic farms (25%), making acchar and eatables of seasonal fruits (15%) and in production of vermicompost (5%) (fig.6). Some of the respondents are working more than 5 years and year by year their participation is increasing day by day by knowing its benefit. Recently, many women workers also joined after knowing its importance from their villagers (fig. 7).

The sampled respondents worked for 5-7 hours per day and got Rs. 130/day in which they spent their money on household chores, children's education, household appliances, children and also they could save enough amount for their future (Fig. 7 & 8). This is more beneficial for women in rural areas as it enables them to add to the family income while taking care of their own home.

Thus, after joining this institution these rural women had experienced drastic changes in their life as well as feel empowered in different aspects of life in socially, economically and personality development such as gaining respect from husband, family members as well as from society; economically independent which helps in gaining self-confident, decision

making, tension free as well decrease in fight with husband; gain knowledge which helped them to spread knowledge to other rural women also (fig. 9). Thus, Banasthali University helps rural women to enhance their personal capabilities and increase decision-making status in the family and society as a whole. This will not only generate income for them but also improve the decision-making capabilities that led to overall empowerment. This will motivate other rural women to join in this type of environmental management programme with the right assistance and they can strengthen their capacities.

Conclusion

Empowerment of women led to development of family and community. Banasthali University, not only providing Scientific knowledge and *PANCHMUKHI SHIKSHA* (fivefold education) but also offers a platform to rural women workers to get empowered by giving training as well as monetarily. There is a great role of rural women workers from the neighboring villages in the environmental management techniques. Through that they were economically empowered and attaining status in family and community. Women got empowered in the form of – economically independent, socially – get respect from society, family and husband, social gathering and Mentally – self - confident, tension free, decrease in fight with husband, gain knowledge, value of education. They also impart knowledge to others which they gain from their work. These women were empowering themselves technically to cope with the changing times and productively using their free time and existing skills for setting and sustaining enterprises. This will not only generate income for them but also improve the decision-making capabilities that led to overall empowerment. Empowering

women particularly rural women is a challenge. Any institution or organization can help to meet these challenges. Following are some of the personal and social capabilities, which were developed as result by training and joining them in sustainable environmental programmes among rural women.

- Economic empowerment
- Improved standard of living
- Self confidence
- Enhance awareness
- Sense of achievement
- Increased social interaction
- Engaged in political activities
- Increased participation level in gram sabha meeting
- Improvement in leadership qualities
- Involvement in solving problems related to women and community
- Decision making capacity in family and community

Increased participation of women in the labour force is a prerequisite for improving the position of women in society and self-employed women. Particularly the entry of rural women in any technical programme will be encouraged and aggravated. Rural women can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in management programmes. The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resources to establish and manage environment. Thus any institutions or organizations can play a great role in empowerment of rural women by giving training as well as providing facilities which helped in shaping their life.

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